

Why Miss Baird Divorced Her German Military Brute

The Appalling Degradation of German Women and the Cruel Humiliations and Brutalities Suffered by German Wives Exposed by the Experiences of One American Girl Who Became a Prussian Officer's Bride

Count Gunther von Bernstorff, the Son of the ex-Ambassador to America. While His Father Was Betraying the Country That Was His Host, the Son Was Betraying the Wife of a Brother Officer Fighting at the Front. When He Was Discovered the Officer Secured a Divorce but Bernstorff's son Was Too Cowardly to Fight the Duel Which the Man He Had Wronged Demanded.



A Pre-War Cartoon from the German Radical Paper "Simplicissimus," Illustrating One Phase of Militarism's Degradation of Women. The Couple Are Standing Looking in a Millinery Shop. The Girl Says, "How I Would Like to Have a Hat Like That." Her Escort, a Civilian, Says, "Don't Wear Anything Like That. It Would Make You Look Too Pretty and Then Some Officer Would Take You." The Inference Is Obvious.

FROM time to time reports have leaked through from Germany indicating that the humiliations and brutalities to which the German woman has long had to accustom herself at the hands of the German male have been intensified by the war to a degree of degradation inconceivable in any civilized race and not to be paralleled even by the lowest savages. These reports have gained full confirmation, and the appalling degeneration of Germany has been more fully revealed by the return to this country of one disillusioned American girl who married one of the Teutonic military brutes—Ruby H. Baird, of St. Louis.

Early in 1914 Miss Baird, daughter of one of her city's oldest and richest families, married Captain Hans W. Baumann, a reserve officer of the German army, who, under the cloak of business, was, without doubt, like scores of other skulking rascals of the Kaiser, serving his fatherland by betraying America.

For a few months they were happy. Baumann, constrained by his American environment, was forced to smother his natural impulses and conform to the American habit of courtesy and kindness to women. When the war broke out he was summoned home by the German Government, and he left, enjoining his wife to follow him as soon as he reached his country. True to her sense of wifely duty, she obeyed. At the first opportunity she sailed for Italy, and, after landing at Genoa, made her way through Italy and Switzerland, and finally joined her husband in Berlin.

There she found not only her husband so profoundly changed that he seemed a stranger, but her own position as different as that of one transported to another sphere. Instead of the considerate, kindly and respectful husband of the American days, she found the true German military "herr"—arrogant, overbearing, cruel and cynically shameless. Instead of the chivalrous treatment the American woman expects and receives from her mate, she was showered with insults, humiliations and barbarities, not only from Baumann, but from his friends, associates and superiors. She had become a German wife—part slave, part drudge, part convenience; both for blows and caresses as brutal as the blows.

She stood it as long as she could, and then with true American courage began suit for divorce. Her affidavit was not alone a complaint against Baumann—it was an indictment of the whole ruling military class of Germany as far as their treatment of their wives is concerned. Her action was received with incredulous amazement. In official circles it was worse than blasphemy! For a time the St. Louis girl was in actual danger—the Government gravely debating whether instead of her "day in court" she ought not to be tried for treason.

But at last certain influences secured for her a hearing, and the divorce was granted. Under care of Mrs. Adolphus Busch, widow of the multi-millionaire brewer of St. Louis and a friend of her family, she was allowed to leave Germany. A few days ago she landed, but under strict instructions from the Department of Justice not to talk either of conditions in Germany or of her divorce and the events leading to it.

Enough has been learned from other sources, however, to cast some light upon her experience, and upon the pitiful and sordid enslavement of the German wife. In Prussia always, and in Germany since

the days of the Prussian domination, the woman has been considered infinitely beneath the man.

It was the Kaiser himself who defined her sphere as that of "Church, Children and Kitchen"—"Kirche, Kinder und Kueche." It is a wife's duty to revere, worship and obey her husband in every thing. She has no individuality except his; no desire save his. No matter what he orders her to do she must do it unquestioningly and thankfully—for from one so high and sacred every command, no matter how humiliating the action ordered may be, has the sacredness of its source, and therefore can be nothing but ennobling. So even blows or beatings are to be taken gladly—or without protest; for is it not blasphemous to protest against the chastening of the Lord, and is not the German husband the lord of his wife? So runs their philosophy.

But this attitude was made worse by the German militarism. If a man was so superior to a woman, he became when an officer a very god. To further the schemes of the military rulers and to prepare the people for the crime they are now perpetrating, they were carefully taught that the "uniform could do no wrong." It did not matter what the officer in the uniform did—once in it any action of his, no matter how despicable, shameful or wicked, became, if not exactly glorious, at least something neither to be resented nor criticized. For to criticize or resent was to insult the uniform, and with this symbol the whole army and sacred edifice of militarism.

It was and is a current saying in Germany that "a man does not become a human being until he becomes an officer." If they felt thus, what was a woman—who is of necessity neither a man nor an officer?

With these ideas their creed it is not to be wondered that the German wife or not wife found herself in the position she is in. The same simple directness with which the German uses poison gas, fire, woman and baby killing, submarines and airplanes to clear his path in war, he showed before the war in clearing his path on the street.

If a woman got in his way, or did not move aside quickly enough to suit him, a slap in the face or a vicious thrust with the hand sent her out into the gutter. Such blows by swaggering officers on the streets of Berlin and other cities were too common even to attract notice.

No civilian's wife, daughter or sweetheart was safe from them, even when escorted by their men. It was "the right of the uniform"—not so very different from the shameful old German "right of the first night"—that any officer might demand presentation to girls and women and order off their escort to wait his pleasure. To resist meant for the German civilian arrest and persecution. To the foreigner it meant almost as great unpleasantness.

Such an occurrence formed shortly before the war a situation that for a time threatened serious diplomatic complications. A certain American was dining at the Adlon in Berlin with a cultured and

Miss Ruby Baird of St. Louis, Whose Divorce from Her Brutal German Husband, Captain Hans W. Baumann, Was an Indictment of the Whole German Military System of Treating Women.

beautiful countrywoman of his. Near by was a table around which were several Prussian lieutenants. The bold looks and comments of these were rapidly angering the American.

At last one of the lieutenants arose, came to the American's table, and with an ironical bow announced to him: "I am the Baron von Something-or-other of His Majesty's Imperial Hussars." The American coldly bowed. The officer repeated his announcement. The American looked at him. "Fool," said the officer, "I wish to be presented to your woman. After that—get out."

The American floored him and the American was arrested. After much trouble he was released. Upon release he was faced with a dozen challenges for duels, with the promise that if he lived, other dozens would follow until his "insult to His Majesty's army was avenged." Life was made so unpleasant and dangerous that at last he was forced to leave Germany.

Captain Baumann's arrogance was noticeably increased when he was promoted to be a captain of the Prussian Guard, instead of an ordinary officer of the reserve. He now wore on his uniform the coveted red facings which marked him out as a superior creature, even among the German military caste. How the uniform was worshipped, even before the war, in Germany was illustrated by the famous episode of the "Captain of Koepenick." In that case a discharged tailor secured a captain's uniform, and, clothed in this magic raiment, visited the little town of Koepenick, where he lived on the fat of the land for a week and borrowed all the money in the town treasury. To-day not only money lies at the mercy of

the uniform, but life, liberty and virtue.

Before the war all these conditions were so common that they passed as subjects for jokes in the German comic papers, particularly in the radical satirical journals, "Simplicissimus" and "Jugend," from which a couple of very illuminating cartoons are printed on this page.

But it was after the war started that this low ideal of womanhood actually began to bear its bitter fruit. The number of illegitimate children in Germany since the war began has not only reached astonishing totals, but is encouraged and subsidized by the Government. Mourning women whose husbands have been killed at the front have been ordered to receive without the rites of marriage healthy soldiers sent to their homes. Unmarried women have not only been encouraged to bear children, but have been ordered to do so.

So far has the rottenness spread that, as the recent Bernstorff divorce case showed, favored young men of the aristocracy wearing the uniform and protected by the Government are living in luxury in Berlin and amusing themselves with the wives of officers and men at the front. Young Bernstorff, the son of the tricky ex-ambassador, was one of these, and while a companion at arms was fighting he be-

trayed his wife. When his friend came back Bernstorff was too cowardly even to fight a duel.

The treatment of the women of conquered provinces by the Germans is, of course, one of the crowning shames of history.

Curiously enough, a recent play, "Her Country," written by Rudolph Bezler and Sybil Spottiswoode, provides extraordinary parallels to Ruby Baird's experiences. The writers of the play were thoroughly familiar with German conditions and habits. The heroine, Margaret Timworth, an American girl, is won by a young officer, Kurt Hartling. The play deals with her life in Germany. Here are two illuminating excerpts from it.

Margaret's German friend Elsa comes to her for sympathy, because her husband is running after another woman:

Elsa—Helena Sombach told me he had been often seen going into a house where one of the waitresses from Bloss's lives—and last night I followed him—and—

(Sobs afresh.)

Margaret—A liaison with a waitress! I never heard anything so beastly in my life! Have you spoken to him yet?

Elsa—Spoken to him? * * * I couldn't. He'd be so angry.

Margaret—Angry! What has he to be angry about? Tell him he can choose between this woman and you. If he doesn't give her up immediately you will leave him.

Elsa—I don't want to leave him, even if I did. I couldn't. Papa would just laugh and tell me to go back.

When Margaret tells her husband about Elsa's sorrow he observes cheerfully: "Men are men with hot blood in their veins—at least in Germany—and the sooner the women realize it the better."

It is known that humiliations even worse than those described in the play were endured by Mrs. Ruby Baird Baumann from her Prussian husband.

Matured by sorrow, Ruby Baird is happy to be in her American home once more.



Another Pre-War Cartoon from "Simplicissimus," Illustrating the Studied Brutality of the German Officer, Taught That "A Man Is Not a Human Being Until He Becomes an Officer." He Has Struck Down an Unoffending Private with His Sword and One of the Private's Comrade's Is Saying, "It Was Lucky He Didn't Move After He Was Hit, Because If He Did He Would Have Been Condemned to Two Years in Prison."